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Insights into hours worked, January 2022

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 **Source:** [Labour Force, Australia, January 2022](#)

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The ABS will continue to publish this additional analysis on a monthly basis until labour market conditions return to a more usual state.

The January survey reference period was from 2 January to 15 January 2022, where there were high numbers of COVID cases associated with the Omicron variant, with considerable disruption across the labour market.

Hours worked decreased by 8.8% (in seasonally adjusted terms) between December 2021 and January 2022. This change in hours worked was more pronounced than for other key indicators, with employment increasing by around 13,000 people (0.1%), unemployment by 6,000 people (1.0%) and the unemployment rate remaining at 4.2%.

Chart 1: Hours worked and employment index, Seasonally adjusted (March 2020 = 100.0)



Source: Labour Force, Australia Tables 1 and 19

Over the course of the pandemic, the ABS has highlighted changes in the number of people working reduced and no hours for 'economic reasons' and 'other reasons' (which have both tended to increase rapidly during periods with lockdowns and other restrictions) and people who were on 'annual leave, holidays, flexitime or long service leave'.

For January 2022, given the extent to which people were sick, the ABS has also highlighted data on people working reduced or no hours due to 'own illness, injury or sick leave'.

Last year, in January 2021, the large 4.9% fall in hours worked mainly reflected more people than usual taking annual leave. At that time there were relatively low numbers of active cases of COVID within the community and impacts were relatively localised.

Chart 1 shows the much larger fall in hours worked in January 2022, as the labour market impacts from the Omicron variant began to be seen. The fall reflected a much higher than usual number of people with an illness or on sick leave, along with higher than usual

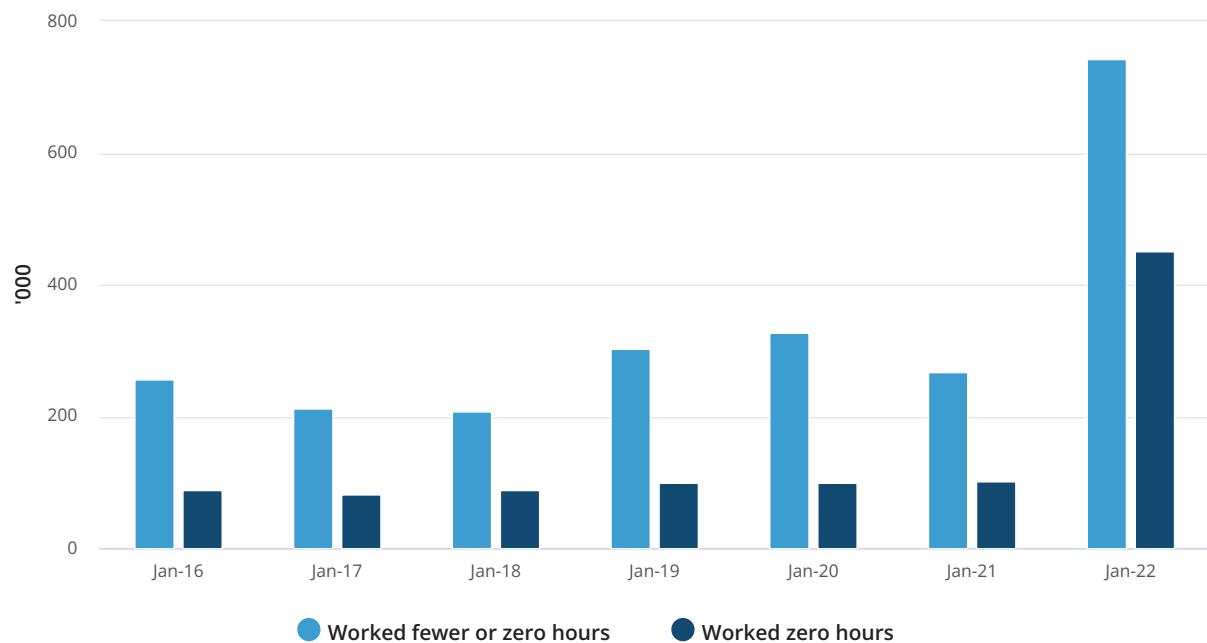
numbers of people taking annual leave or working reduced or no hours due to economic and other reasons.

People working fewer hours due to own illness, injury or sick leave

Chart 2 shows there were 744,000 people who were working fewer or zero hours due to own illness, injury or sick leave in January 2022, which was more than double the number of people in January 2019 and January 2020, and triple the average from the six Januaries before the pandemic.

The increase in people working no hours at all in a week because they were sick was particularly pronounced and more than four times the pre-pandemic average. January is the middle of summer and usually only around 90,000 to 100,000 people in Australia are away from work sick for an entire week. In January 2022, there were 449,900 people (3.4% of employed people), which was also much higher than the winter months in Australia, when sick leave usually peaks in August at around 140,000 to 170,000 people.

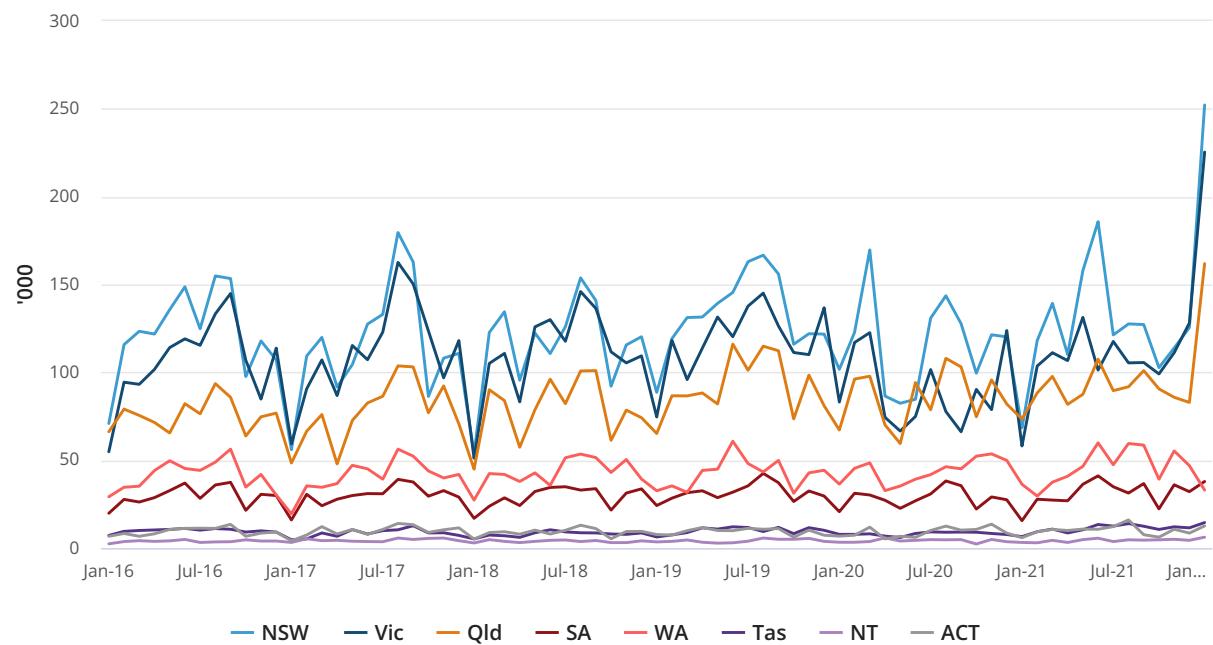
Chart 2: Employed people who worked fewer or zero hours due to own illness, injury or sick leave, Original



Source: Labour Force, Australia Data Cube EM2a

Chart 3 shows large increases in people working fewer hours, or no hours at all, in January due to their own illness, personal injury or sick leave in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland. Western Australia was the only state or territory with a seasonal decline in sick leave.

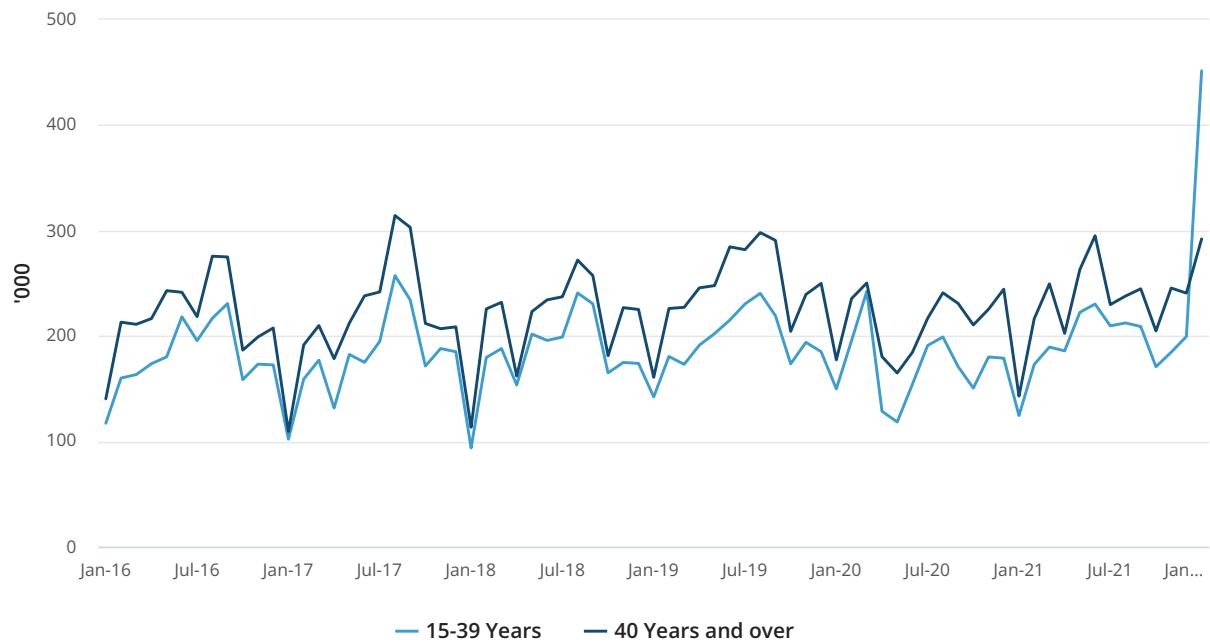
Chart 3: People working fewer than their usual hours due to own illness, personal injury or sick leave, Original



Source: Labour Force, Australia Data Cube EM2b

Chart 4 shows that the increase in people who worked fewer hours, or no hours at all, due to illness, personal injury or sick leave was seen mostly in younger age groups.

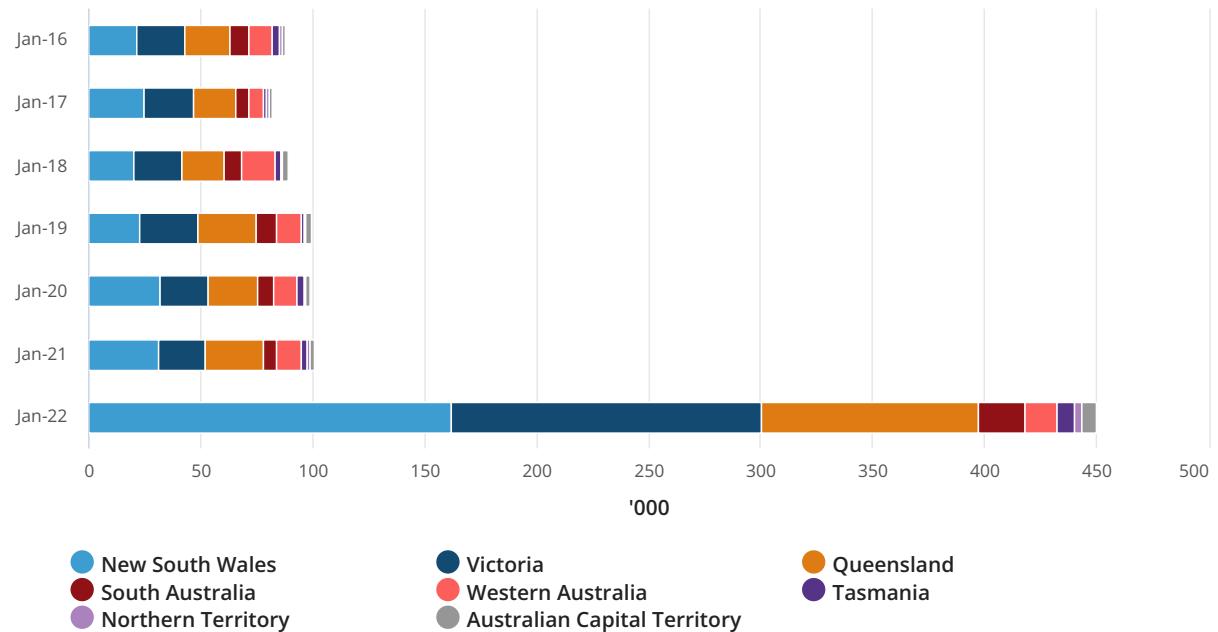
Chart 4: People working fewer than their usual hours due to own illness, personal injury or sick leave, Original



Source: Labour Force, Australia Data Cube EM2a

Chart 5 shows the particularly pronounced increase in the number of employed people who were away from work for the entire week due to own illness, personal injury or sick leave in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland. This shows that, in addition to more people being sick in January, there were more people sick for an extended period of time than would normally be the case in the middle of summer.

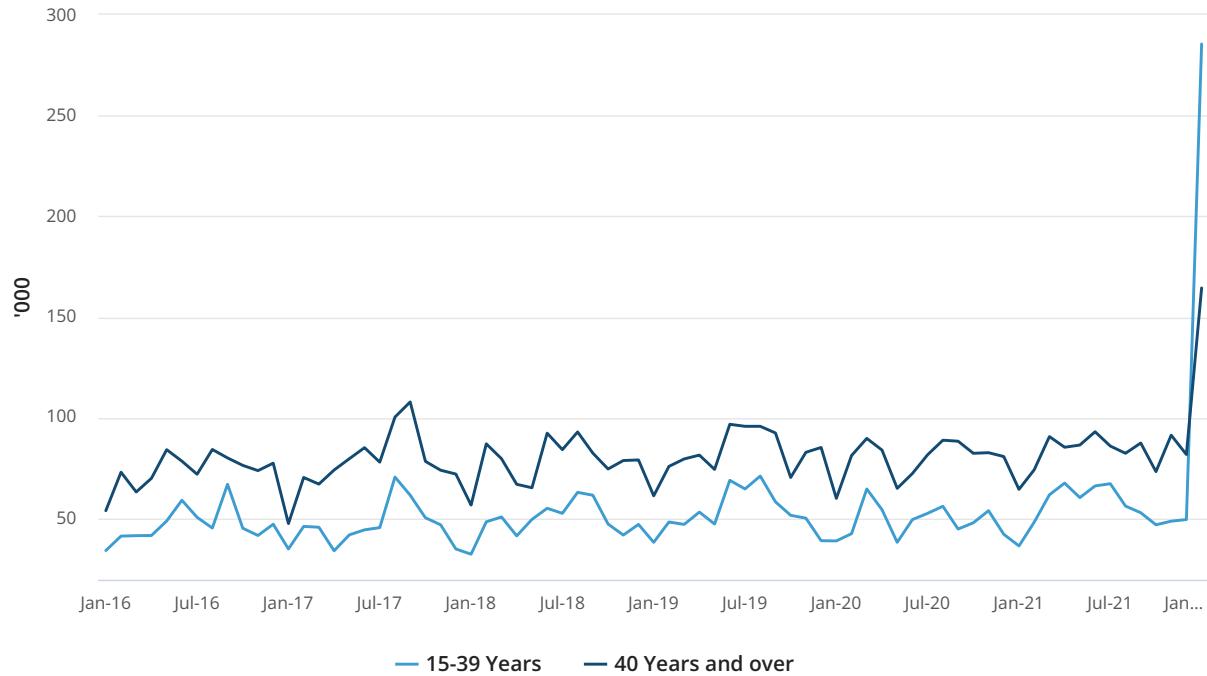
Chart 5: Employed people working zero hours due to own illness, personal injury or sick leave, Original



Source: Labour Force, Australia Data Cube EM2b

Chart 6 shows that younger people were particularly impacted by illness, personal injury or sick leave, with much higher numbers of people working no hours because they were sick. For example, there were 93,500 20-24 year olds in January 2022, compared with 10,600 in January 2020.

Chart 6: Employed people working zero hours due to own illness, injury or sick leave, Original



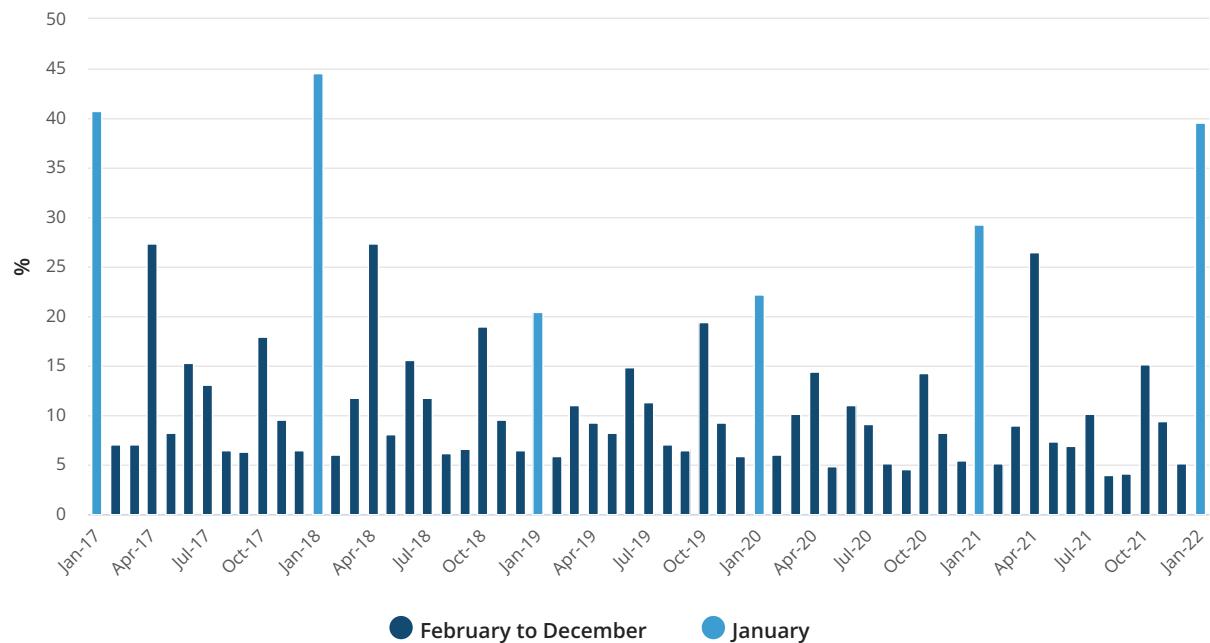
Source: Labour Force, Australia Data Cube EM2a

People working fewer hours due to annual leave, holidays, flexitime or long service leave

Chart 7 shows that there is a seasonal increase in the number of people working fewer hours due to annual leave, holidays, flexitime or long service leave every January.

The size of the increase in January is influenced by the timing of the January Labour Force Survey reference period, which can start on a Sunday as early as 31 December (as in January 2018) or as late as 6 January (as in January 2019). The earlier the reference period, the closer to the New Year, and the larger the increase in people taking leave.

Chart 7: Percentage of employed people on annual leave, holidays, flextime or long service leave, Original



Source: Labour Force, Australia Data Cube EM2a

The reference period of the January 2022 survey (Sunday 2 January to Saturday 15 January) was the same as January 2011, 2006 and 1995. However, as Table 1 shows, the percentage of employed taking leave in January 2022 was higher than in those years.

Table 1: Percentage of employed taking annual leave, holidays, flextime or long service leave

	%
Jan-22	39.5
Jan-11	35.9
Jan-06	38.7
Jan-95	37.5

Source: Labour Force, Australia Data Cube EM2a

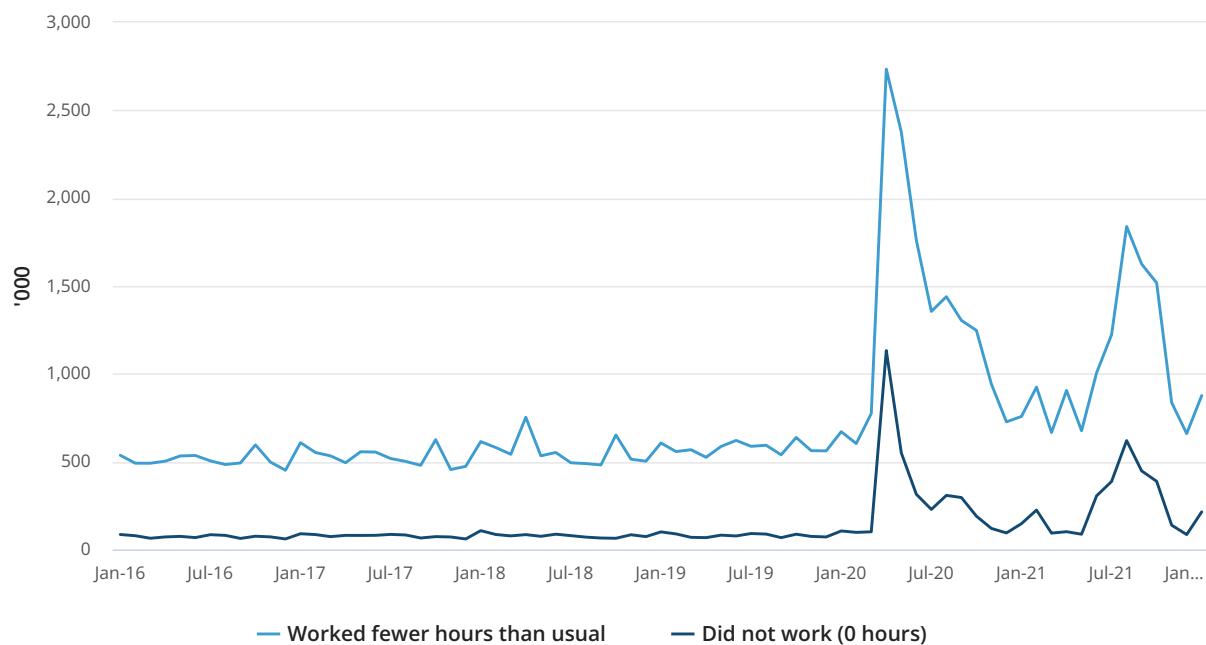
In January 2022, around 5.2 million employed people worked fewer hours or no hours

because they were taking annual leave, holidays, flexitime or long service leave in early January. Around 3.2 million employed worked no hours at all for these reasons.

People working fewer hours for economic and other reasons

Chart 8 shows that the number of people working fewer or no hours for economic and other reasons was elevated in January 2022, compared with the pre-pandemic period, but less so than for most of the pandemic.

Chart 8: No work, not enough work available or stood down & Worked fewer hours than usual for other reasons, Original



Source: Labour Force, Australia Data Cube EM2a

Table 2 highlights the change between January 2020 and January 2022 for Australia, New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland in the number of people working fewer or no hours for economic and other reasons.

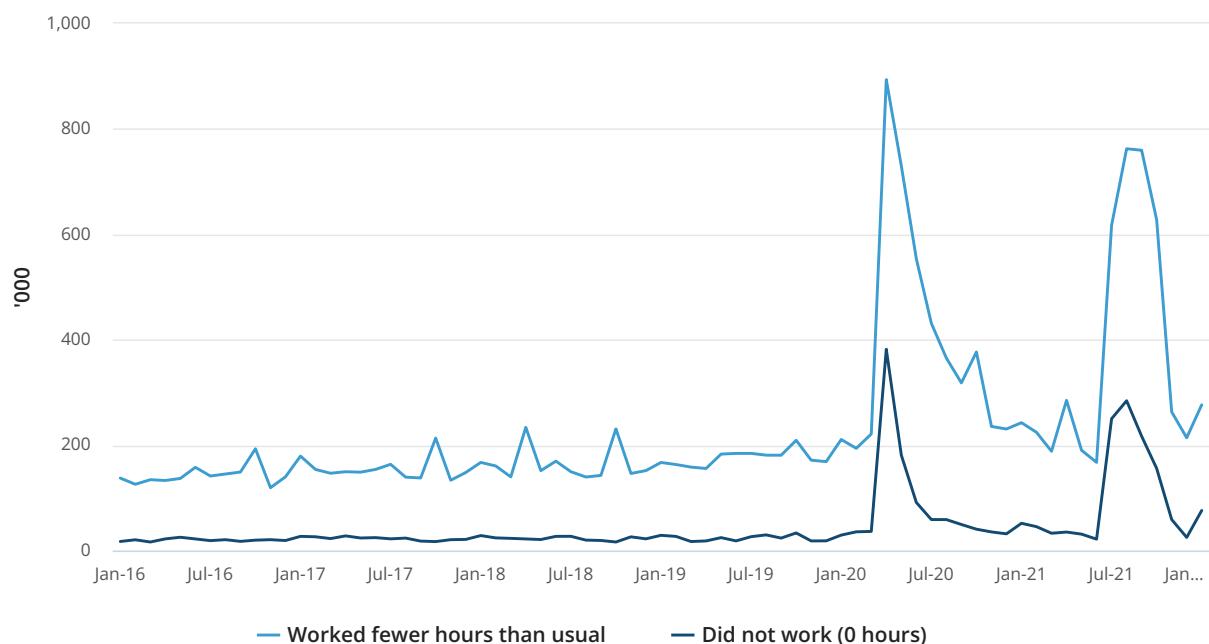
Table 2: No work, not enough work available or stood down & Worked fewer hours than usual for other reasons, Original

	Australia	New South Wales	Victoria	Queensland
<hr/>				
Employed people who worked fewer hours than usual ('000):				
January 2020	670.7	210.8	193.9	130.1
January 2022	876.3	276.6	222.3	173.7
<hr/>				
Employed people who did not work (0 hours) ('000):				
January 2020	105.6	29.4	36.1	19.3
January 2022	214.4	76.1	65.8	29.2

Source: Labour Force, Australia Data Cube EM2a and EM2b

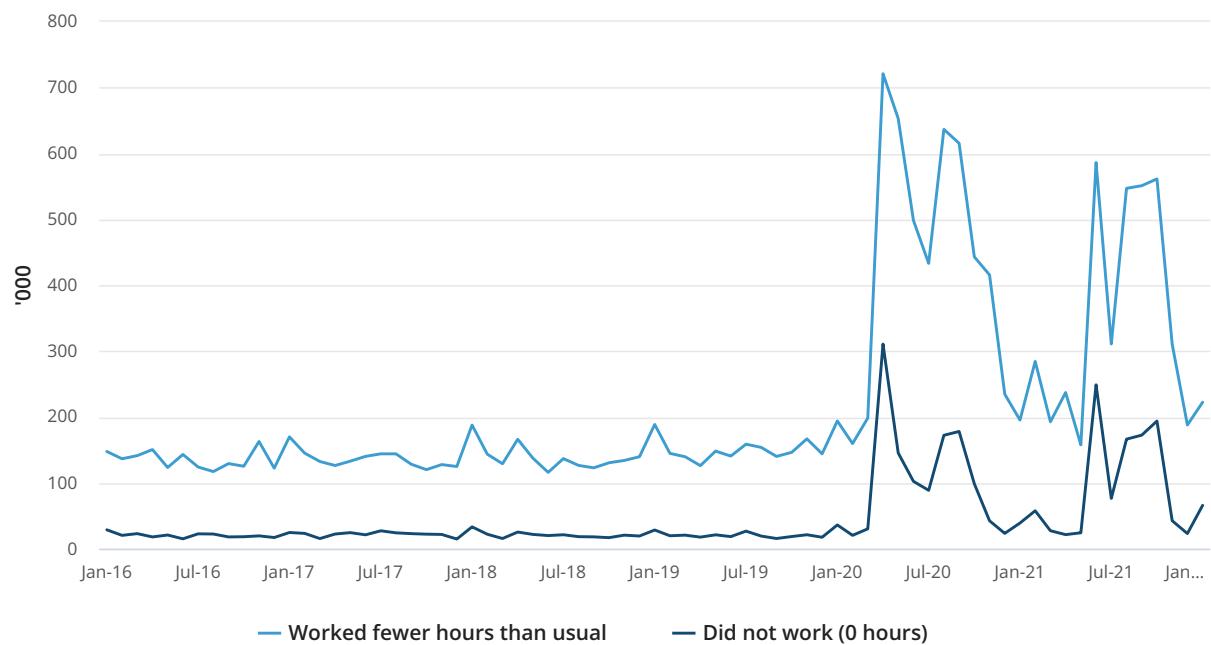
Charts 8a, 8b and 8c show that this was also seen in data for New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland.

Chart 8a: No work, not enough work available or stood down & Worked fewer hours than usual for other reasons, NSW Original



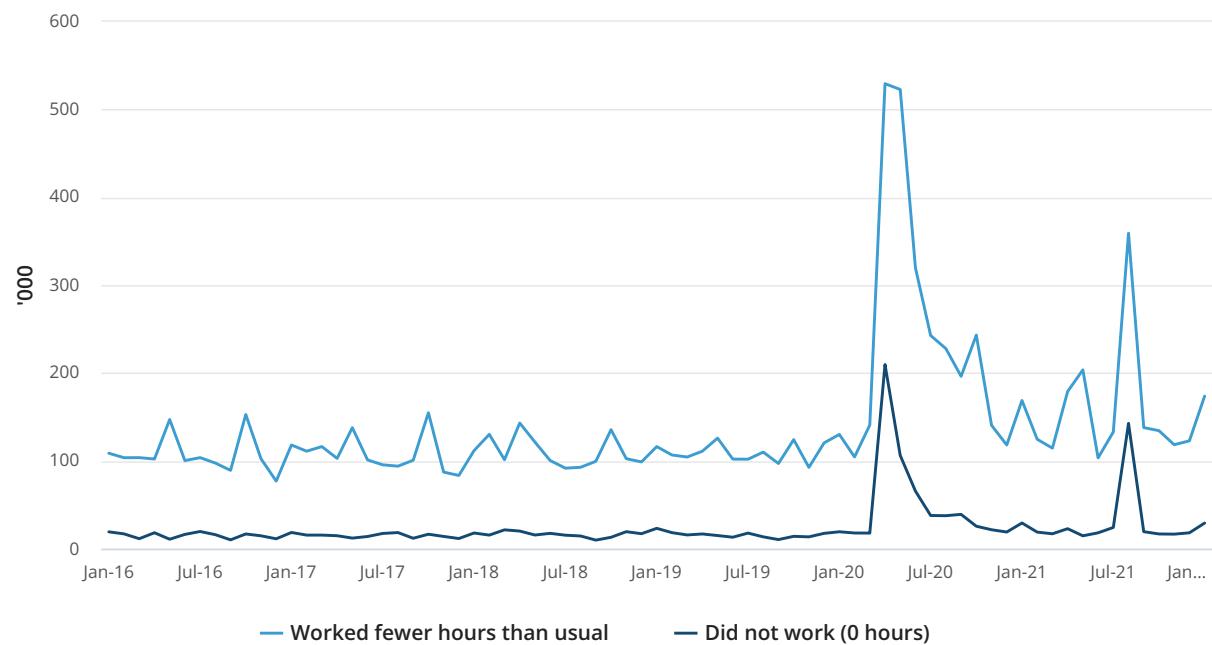
Source: Labour Force, Australia Data Cube EM2b

Chart 8b: No work, not enough work available or stood down & Worked



Source: Labour Force, Australia Data Cube EM2b

Chart 8c: No work, not enough work available or stood down & Worked fewer hours than usual for other reasons, Queensland, Original



Source: Labour Force, Australia Data Cube EM2b